(b) if so, on what basis the Government steps have been termed as harmful for development in the report;

(c) whether Government agrees with the views expressed in the report; and

(d) if so, what is the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) to (d) As per the report released by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), many countries have resorted to restricting food exports and reducing restrictions on imports through tariff cuts to check price rise. According to the Report, such price controls and change in import and export policies may address problems of poor consumers but some of these policies are likely to make the international market smaller and more volatile. The Report suggests that any long-term strategy to stabilize food prices will need to include increased agricultural production.

While the Government agrees with the view that agricultural production must increase to stabilize food prices, the Government does not concur with the proposition that ban on exports and easing imports would limit production. Export restrictions and ease of imports are intended to increase domestic availability of food-grains, thereby insulating consumers from global price increases. As a long-term strategy to stabilize food prices, Government has initiated the National Food Security Mission to increase production of rice, wheat and pulses by 10 million tonnes, 8 million tonnes and 2 million tonnes respectively. Government, by increasing the support price of major crops, is also providing adequate incentive to farmers.

Technical snags in aircrafts in Air India and Indian Airlines

†*578. SHRI MOTILAL VORA:
SHRI SATYAVRAT CHATURVEDI:

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) the number of flights affected due to technical snags in the aircrafts of Air India and Indian Airlines during the last one year;

(b) whether it is a fact that Air India's flight number 111 from Amritsar to Delhi had to land at Rajasansi airport due to leakage of hydraulic oil;

(c) if so, the reasons for frequent technical snags in aircrafts; and

(d) the steps Government is taking to avoid the risk to life of passengers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) Details are being collected.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Technical snags in aircraft are normal industry phenomenon. Technical snags are mainly caused due to malfunction of components/accessories fitted on the aircraft. There are various factors affecting the reliability of the engine/components/accessories such as age of the aircraft, operational environment of the aircraft, pattern of operation of the aircraft etc.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) All aircrafts in NACIL, into which Air India and Indian Airliens have merged, are maintained as per approved schedule/programme. Further, regulatory agencies such as DGCA, EASA, IOSA, ICAO etc. carry out safety audits from time to time.

High level of fluoride and arsenic in ground water

*579. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a recent study by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) had indicated that the ground water in over 200 districts of the country has a high level of flouride and arsenic, posing a big public-health hazard;

(b) whether it is also a fact that among 184 districts across 19 States, Rajasthan is the worst placed with all its 32 districts at risk, while Orissa and Gujarat have 18 districts in the danger list, as revealed in the CGWB website; and

(c) if so, the steps Government has taken to address the problem?

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ): (a) to (c) The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) periodically monitors ground water quality at regional level. The analysis of samples has indicated high concentration of Fluoride and Arsenic in isolated pockets of 221 districts and 30 districts respectively, in various States. The permissible limit for Fluoride and Arsenic content in drinking water is 1.5 milligram per litre and 0.01 milligram per litre respectively.

In the State of Rajasthan, sporadic occurrence of Fluoride has been reported from all the 33 districts. Isolated pockets of 24 districts in Gujarat and 18 districts in Orissa are also affected with Fluoride contamination.

The steps taken to address the above problems include the following:

(i) Exploration is conducted by CGWB to find out ground water sources free from Arsenic/Fluoride contaminants.

(ii) Technical guidance is provided to the State agencies in tackling the problem of water quality and to take initiatives for capacity building of personnel of State Drinking Water Supply agencies.

(iii) Financial and technical assistance is provided to States under Centrally Sponsored Scheme, namely Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) for provision of safe drinking water to the rural population as per the stipulated norms.

(iv) Financial assistance is provided to States under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT).

Cost overrun of pending projects

*580. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) how many projects, including the joint ventures of the Ministry, its PSUs and subordinate offices costing over rupees 20 crore or more are running behind schedule;